



# NORTHAMPTON ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

## APPROVED MINUTES

April 11, 2019

City Council Chambers

212 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060

4:00 PM – 5:30 PM

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**Attendees:** Bill Dwight, Alisa Klein, Ashley Muspratt, Wayne Feiden, Tim Smith, Richard Parasiliti, Ben Weil, Louis Hasbrouck

**Facilitator:** Chris Mason, Energy and Sustainability Officer

**Scribe:** Douglas Renick

### Public Comment Period:

Adele Franks: ICC energy efficiency code follow-up. Push BBRS toward a stretch code. She's asking for an NESC letter and attendance at the March 7<sup>th</sup> hearing. I have the template for a letter. There is a bill by Senator Jo Comerford that requires the BBRS to create a stretch code. Adele will send the template letter to the Commission. Another way to think of it – a path to a stretch code.

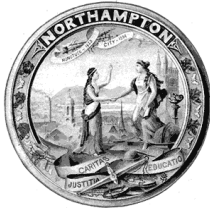
**Review/approve minutes of 3/14/18 meeting:** Bill Dwight moved the approval and Ashley Muspratt seconded. Unanimous Approval.

**RentLab – Something for Northampton?:** RentLab is an on-line listing of rental units that provides information on “green” features such as access to transportation, waste management (recycling etc.) and energy use. Shift to a site that would show green listings. Grant ran out. RentRocket has re-arisen named RentLab. They are looking for input on the elements of a smart living score. We can provide general feedback for them. Is this a tool we can use in our city and in our area? There is a web page showing lowest utility costs for rental units. Also, a dashboard that shows features of elements of a smart living score. It uses the walk score. Northampton has a 98 walk score. The score indicates what stuff is close to you not how walkable it is. Could we do this for Northampton? It's not clear. Some real estate sites incorporate these scores. The original idea was to show the energy efficiency of units. Could rental listing sites use this information? Cynical about getting all these data points in one place. Many scores are based on assumptions and are not specific. The information is needed, but there are so many assumptions that it makes it not very useful. If it was hard data, would it be useful? It would have to be reported hard data. Have to have a way to get people to look at it. Getting fair, hard data is difficult. If there were requirements for reporting data and the city provided it, it would bear more weight. I'm skeptical about this. How do we get mass data so it's hard data, it's fair and it has relevance? Are there privacy issues? Legal issues? Boston did it for large systems. New construction is straight forward and simple. But for older buildings who knows whether they have insulation in their attic? General sense is that self-reported data is not viable unless it is required. If a real estate owner could give the utility the freedom (green button) to share data, that would be helpful but not likely. State capital management and maintenance agency documented the improvements in buildings. Saying that this is in the interest of and for the use of renters is not really helpful. It's not the right tool. Property owners would be threatened by showing costs of utilities. Rental units are limited in number. We should be focused on affordable

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**Ex-officio, non voting:** Chris Mason



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housing, affordable rental units. People who would use such a tool are probably not restrained by the money they have. Fixed or low-income people would not use this tool. There is no accessibility score. This could be abused. There are others making scoring systems. Too many scoring systems could be confusing. Other cities are incentivizing affordable housing. Northampton has used zoning for this purpose. If people know of on-line listings with rating systems, let Chris know of them.

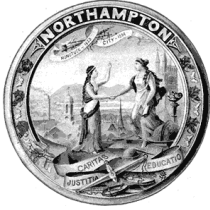
**Voting on IECC 2021:** Northampton will have 24 votes. Four hundred (400) votes nationwide can make a difference. There will be over 424 votes in MA alone. The vote is in September.

**Ordinance Relative to Large-Scale Ground-Mounted Solar Arrays:** Hearings are happening now. The concern is that large scale solar arrays developers are looking for land with forests. Currently Carolyn has been working on this ordinance and has cleared it with lawyers. Lot size: based on a habitat analysis and a carbon sequestration analysis, Definitions have been cleared up: larger trees, older trees. Crux of challenges – start at one acre and planning board size starts at 3 acres. If 25K board feet worth of trees are to be cleared, then a forestry plan required. Trees providing 25K board feet of lumber translates to approximately 3 acres. If you clear trees for a residence, then 1.5 acres of tree cutting is allowed. Concern about agricultural land that is being lost. A permit from state is required if the cutting is larger than a 25k board feet area. Right now the loop hole is clearing can happen with the state not doing anything about it. The state has been no help. State is focused on taxing the solar arrays. Statute says that solar arrays are exempt. Ordinance was written and the Public Shade Tree Commission (PSTC) had a problem. The ordinance was re-written. PSTC still not happy. A sticking point is how to compare the value of trees and value of solar panels relative to the release of CO2. Some say stumps left in the ground do sequester carbon. Others say no they don't. Solar panels may be much smaller in the future but cutting is of trees that take a long time to grow. Transmission lines from the panels is an issue. Legislative matters committee is continuing the hearings. The NESC has not been formally asked for its input. Cost/benefit analysis is very difficult. Solar arrays make money. Forests don't. How to do it so it is fair? We want to do this right. Two permits for arrays have been granted. Arrays provide a good return for city as a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT). The PSTC is conducting the conversation with the Planning Department. We have the knowledge. Tree committee has asked for a slow down of the process to do the proper research and analysis. Panels have a life time of 20 years. The trees being cut are 100 years old. After panels are used up, the infrastructure will remain. Also, what are the trees going to be used for – burning or building? Old growth trees have sequestered much more carbon than a new forest will. The science on this is not exact. We are vulnerable now. We want to make good enough law that will get us through this period of transition without support from the state. Expanding acreage now is questionable. The forest provides so many other services. The cost of the structures for arrays is so much more than the panels themselves. The consensus on acreage is getting close. How can the commission help? We've heard from the PSTC. Concepts: zero energy code, green structures. We need

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to make strides toward the sustainable energy future. It's going to make a difference. Our carbon sequestration systems are in place. We must make law. In the absence of the law things happen. If we as a commission can't come to agreement, then how can we weigh in? The absence of a clear answer is an answer. Timing? This issue is worth a conversation between Chris, Lily, Carolyn, Rich. The tree committee would like one acre not three. Can the city require someone to produce the study needed? Yes it's included. The city can require any filing pieces, taking consequences into consideration. Can we require how wood would be used? Yes, but they would get around it. Chris would be happy to meet. NESC next meeting is on May 9<sup>th</sup>. This should be on the agenda, maybe. Alisa will send Chris a list of issues to be researched. CO2 cost of infrastructure of solar arrays has to be included. On a house the CO2 return to pay for the panels is about a year or between .7 and 1.5 years. Infrastructure could last 100 years. Replacing panels after 20 years will be very cheap.

**Adjournment:** Bill Dwight moved to adjourn and Ashley Muspratt seconded. Unanimous approval.

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